

THE PRISONER OF THE BASTILE.

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CHAPTER I.

A man came riding along the highway which led from Paris to the palace of St. Cloud, where the royal family of France had taken up its abode. A lady, stationed in one of the upper windows of the palace, seemed to be watching, for she leaned from the open window and looked keenly after the man, as if trying to recognize him with certainty. The horseman was looking earnestly toward the building, and she saw his face clearly. There was no mistaking those features after seeing them once. The great leonine head, with its shock of heavy hair; the seamed cheeks, and massive jaw, could only belong to one man, Count Mirabeau.

The Duchess de Polignac, for it was no less a person who had been placed on the watch, drew slowly away from the window, that the man who searched the house so closely might not see her. Then she stole from the room, and crossing some intervening apartments, entered the presence of Marie Antoinette, whose friend and, confidential lady she had been for some dangerous years.

The queen was walking up and down the room in a state of unusual agitation. You could see by the light in her fine eyes, and the compression of her mouth, that she was about to undertake some task utterly distasteful to her. She turned sharply as the duchess came in, and said, with unusual imperiousness,

"Well!"

"He is here, your highness. He has just passed."

"Alone?"

"On horseback, and quite alone!"

"Look again, and tell me which way he goes."

The duchess left the room, and Marie Antoinette resumed her impatient walk, now folding her arms, then tearing them apart, and resting them on her bosom for a moment, as if to hold back the fierce swelling of her feet. There had been a terrible struggle before that proud woman and brave queen could prevail upon herself to give the reprobate count the meeting which he had come to St. Cloud that day to claim from her promise. She had been reasoned with by her friends, persuaded by the king, and at last had given a reluctant consent to see this man, who had always been persistently denied access to her presence. Now, in the sore strait to which royalty, in France, was driven, she had come to this sad humiliation, and was about to meet Count Mirabeau, the renegade from his class, the coarse noble, the eloquent leader of a riotous people, in private, and utterly alone.

But time wore on, and Polignac did not return. Had she been mistaken? Had the man passed them, in the coarse mockery so natural to his character, thus flinging back years of contempt upon her, and scoffing at the concessions she had been compelled to make? The proud blood of Marie Therese burned in her veins as the thought flashed across her brain. She clenched her hand in an agony of shame, and stood in the centre of the room, listening with the breathless eagerness of a girl waiting for her lover. Yet she hated this man with a thorough revolt of her whole nature. He was utterly disgusting to her taste as a woman, and she thoroughly despised the means by which he had obtained the power she dreaded, and was ready to conciliate.

The duchess came at last. She had gone to one of the topmost windows of the palace, and from thence had seen the count ride along the highway toward a distant grove, where he had evidently left his horse; for directly he came forth again, and passed into the Park, where he was

now loitering, apparently, but making quiet progress toward the place of rendezvous.

Marie Antoinette drew a deep breath; at least she had escaped a possible insult from the man she loathed. He had been faithful to his appointment. She must go and meet him.

The beautiful woman and the proud queen went hand-in-hand with Marie Antoinette. It was not enough that she could command homage by her state; in order to make it perfect, she must win it by those womanly charms which few men had ever resisted. In order -to bind this man to her chariot-wheels, she must win him to her side, body and soul. There must be no appearance of dislike in her manner to him. All the force of her beauty and genius must be brought against him. He was not to be convinced by argument, but won in spite of himself.

No woman that ever lived—save, perhaps, Mary, of Scotland, who was not more lovely in her person than this unhappy Queen of France—could better have performed the task before her. She was still beautiful. What she had lost of youth came back to her in the dignity and assured grace of ripe womanhood. The necessities of her life had brought tact and keen perception with them. But she knew that all these qualities would be taxed to their utmost. The man she had to deal with was brilliant, keen, unprincipled; but she knew that with such men there is sometimes a feeling of chivalric devotion where women are concerned, which, once enlisted, amounts almost to honor. These were the thoughts that made Marie Antoinette so earnest and so restless. She hated the task allotted her, but for that reason was the more resolved to accomplish it. Her dignity as a queen, and her supremacy with the sex, demanded it.

"Yes! I must go now," she said, drawing a shawl of black lace, which Polignac brought, over her head and shoulders. "It will not do to keep this man waiting. Ah! it is hard when a Queen of France is brought to this, my Polignac. Wait for me, and watch that no one follows."

"How beautiful you are!" said the duchess, as she arranged a fold of the shawl. "I never saw a finer flush of roses on your cheeks!"

"It is the shame breaking out from my heart, duchess—shame that my mother's child should be so humbled."

Perhaps it was; but the woman was triumphing in her talent and her beauty all the time, else why had she put on that exquisite robe, with its silken shimmer of greenish gold, or held the black lace, that fell over it like a shadow, so exquisitely over the red roses in her bosom? She had made many conquests in her life; but never that of a human animal, so brilliant in his coarseness as this Count Mirabeau. Away in the Park was a little temple, or a summer-house, in which members of the royal family, sometimes, rested themselves after a fatiguing walk. It had been arranged that the count should await the royal lady in this pretty building. Marie Antoinette walked away from the palace so quietly that no one of her household heeded her departure, for it had always been her habit to walk alone, or with attendants, in the Park of Versailles, or St. Cloud, as the caprice might come upon her. So she sauntered on quietly enough while the palace was in sight; but the moment it was shut out by the trees, her step became rapid, and her breath came quickly, and she moved forward in vivid excitement, as if preparing herself for an encounter with some splendid wild animal.

She reached the Mftimer-house just as the sun was pouring a flood of crimson and gold into the violet shadows that lay among the trees which sheltered the little temple. The windows, where they were visible through the clustering ivy and flowers, blazed with the arrowy light that broke against them, and the soft grass that lay around grew ruddy in the rich light.

This seemed a good omen to the queen, who stepped lightly over the turf and entered the temple where Mirabeau was standing, so swiftly that he had hardly time to turn from the window, where he had been watching for her, before she stood face to face with him.

Marie Antoinette had never been within speaking distance of this magnificent demagogue before. She was astonished by the wonderful power that lay in supreme ugliness. His face had the fascination which some wild animals possess, and his deep-set eyes dwelt upon her with the half-sleepy, half-pleading look which these animals have when but

half aroused.

She came forward, radiant from her walk, fresh from the soft breeze that had swept over her, but a little shyly, as a woman of pure modesty meets a stranger. When Mirabeau saw her face, and the light that shone in those splendid eyes, he sunk upon one knee, and bent his head, but not so low as to conceal the smile that transfigured all his face.

"Ah, madame! how long I have pined and prayed for this hour," he said, lifting his eyes to her face with an expression that made her breath come fast, for it changed the whole aspect of that face like a miracle, and drew her toward him with a fascination that troubled her; for hatred of the man had been to her a sure safeguard, and she began to tremble lest it should pass away from her. She expected audacity, but looked down upon a strong, powerful man, who had thrown himself at her feet with the docility of a Newfoundland dog.

"Arise, Monsieur Count," she said, smiling upon him; and she was astonished to find how naturally the smile came to her lips. "If we have not been friends before, it is rather our misfortune than yours."

"Ah! if your highness could have thought so! But my enemies prevailed against me until it is now almost too late."

"Nothing is too late for a man like Mirabeau," said the queen again, motioning that he should arise. "You, who have taught the people of France to hate their king, can, with the same powers of eloquence, convince them that he is their best friend."

Mirabeau arose to his feet, and again that smile flashed over the woman, who could not turn her eyes from the marvelous brightness that transfigured his face.

"Ah! if I had the power your highness awards me, and you would deign to use it, no slave of the thousands who have knelt at your feet would be so grateful as Mirabeau."

The queen seated herself on a divan that curved in with the walls of the

temple. Mirabeau followed, and stood near her; but she swept the folds of her dress together, and motioned that he should take the place by her side.

"This is honor, better still, happiness," he said, accepting the seat. "How often, fair queen, have I wondered why you kept me from you. Never in the world had sovereign a more devoted subject."

Marie Antoinette sighed heavily; she began to comprehend how much power had been flung away in keeping this man from the court. She could appreciate now the wonderful influence he possessed with the people.

"But now," she said, sweetly, "cannot the past, with all its mistakes, be forgotten? Of all people in the world, a sovereign is most likely to be deceived with regard to those who surround him. We were led—"

Mirabeau forgot that it was the queen who spoke, and with the same impetuous roughness which made his popularity with the people, broke in upon her half-finished sentence.

"You were led to believe me wild, unprincipled, selfish; a man who belonged to the people only because he was rejected by his own class. Part of this is true, but more false. Had you deigned to call me to your aid, madame, a more devoted slave would not have lived."

Marie Antoinette sat in supreme astonishment. How was she to reach this man—through his greatness or through his sine?

For the first time in her queenly life Marie Antoinette doubted herself. In Mirabeau she saw the two contending elements which already distracted France—the refinements of the court and the fierce strength of its antagonists, inordinate self-love and ready self-abasement-. She knew at once that her intellect, clear and acute as it was, could not cope with his; but in those soft flatteries of look and speech, that undermine and persuade, she was more than a match for any man or woman of France. Men who do not like to be convinced are the most easily persuaded.

"They have, indeed, misled us," she answered, leaning gently toward the man, who turned upon her for the instant with the gleam of a wild beast in his eyes; but the look softened down beneath her glance, and the upright form bent imperceptibly toward her. "I will not say how many cruel things have poisoned the ear of my august husband, or wounded my own self-love."

Here Mirabeau started to his feet.

"Have they dared to hint that I ever whispered one word against your highness as a queen, and the loveliest woman in Europe?"

"Perhaps I have heard worse than that."

"Worse than that? Nay, then, I should have been the brute they call me. But tell me who my traducers are?"

"Forgive me if I withhold all such knowledge. If Count Mirabeau is to be our friend, he must not exhaust himself in private quarrels."

"If I am to be your friend, madame? Who ever knew Mirabeau war against a woman?"

"But when that woman is a queen, the wife of a king, and the daughter of an empress, the weight of her royalty may overpower everything else."

Mario Antoinette said this in a tone of apology, as if she longed to make some excuse for the thrice royal power that might weigh against her loveliness.

Mirabeau was struck by this sweet humility; a soft protesting smile stole over his face as the queen lifted her eyes to his, and held her gaze in fascination.

"Madame, turn those eyes away. Ah! I was told truly; a man must be brave to audacity who could refuse anything to that glance. I am your slave already; only tell me how I can best begin my service."

The heart in Marie Antoinette's bosom leaped to her lips, and broke over it in a bright smile ; but no look of the triumph she felt came to her eyes, they were moist with sweet thankfulness, nothing more.

"It is not for me to say how you can best serve us. The genius that has struck us so deeply will know how to reassert itself. In the Assembly, no voice has been so eloquent against royalty as that of Count Mirabeau."

"I know it! I know it! But how am I to unsay that which the people have accepted as gospel?"

"Tell them that they are mistaken in their belief about the king. Oh, monsieur! you have no true knowledge of that brave and good man. You heap the sins of all the previous ; kings of France upon his head. You have made him odious with the people, when they have no better friend on earth. Tell the people this; as you alone can express a noble truth. Wing H with your eloquence. Enforce it by the profound respect which you must feel when the heart of Louis the Sixteenth is really known to you. I say to you, monsieur, there is not a man in all France who has the good of his people so close at heart. Has he not forgiven much—granted more? Do the people who malign him never think of the great outrages that have been perpetrated against him? Are not the ruins of the Bastille before their eyes?"

A kingly fortress so completely identified with the royalty of France that it was like tearing out the jewels of her crown when the people razed it to the ground. Yet no man has yet been punished for the traitorous deed. The king forgave what was an insult to his power, and a wrong against himself. Nay, since then, has he not heaped concession on concession; opened the very barriers of royalty, that the people may rush in; changed his ministers, and disgraced his best friends at their Insolent bidding—"

Marie Antoinette stopped suddenly. The passion in her voice, and the quick flash of her eyes was fast undoing the sweet impression she had made upon this singular man. She saw it this by the changed expression of his face, and made haste to retrieve herself.

"It is of my husband, I speak," she said; "and that makes me forget

myself. A kinder sovereign never lived, or one more willing to make all reasonable concessions. If I am earnest in saying this, it is because those who wish to serve Louis must understand all his goodness, all that he is willing to grant and to suffer. Believe me, monsieur, I do not speak thus because he is my husband—that would be a weak reason, when dealing with a statesman of France; but in this I only think of him as a sovereign and a Frenchman, loving his country and people with more than the affection of a father. "

Mirabeau looked upon that animated, beautiful face with kindling admiration. He could appreciate the bright intellect which broke out through all her sweetest and most feminine wiles. She was, in fact, a woman above all others to seize upon his imagination, and touch his wayward heart.

"I would rather tell the people of France of their queen," he said.

Tears rushed into Marie Antoinette's eyes. She clasped her hands in her lap.

"Ah! they will never, never believe anything good of me; and I loved them so well— so well!" she said.

"They shall be made to. think everything that is good of you, Mirabeau will have lost his power to carry the people with him," cried the count, with enthusiasm. "Henceforth the man who does not worship Marie Antoinette, is to me a repulsive enemy."

"Oh! I do not ask worship, monsieur; only a little justice. Why will they distort everything I say or do?"

She was weeping in a soft, womanly way, that touched the heart of that man like the innocent cry of a child.

"Why will the people of France not look upon their queen as a French woman. I came among them so young, so earnest to make them love me; but it is always the Austrian! the Austrian!

As if it were a sin to be the daughter of Marie Therese!"

"Sweet lady! the people do not know you; their leaders do not know you. Up to this hour I have myself looked upon Marie Antoinette as the enemy of liberty—a stranger to France and her people."

"How can I help this? How can I undeceive a people who are determined to think ill of me?" cried the queen.

"By letting them see their queen as I do; by granting all that can reasonably be conceded to them."

"But concession belongs to the king."

Mirabeau smiled more broadly than was becoming in the presence of his sovereign; but, during this whole interview, there had been so little of courtly ceremony, that the queen scarcely heeded it. The very act of her meeting any man in the solitude of that place, put court etiquette completely aside.

"The king must be unlike inferior men, if he were not guided in most things by so fair and sweet a counsellor."

"That is hard," answered the queen. "I can no more control the monarch of France than I can make the people love me."

"The people shall love you, or hate me IV W exclaimed Mirabeau, with enthusiasm. "Do not speak so sadly; do not despair of a just appreciation. When Mirabeau says to the people, I have seen this lady whom you call the Austrian; she is fair, she is wise, her heart yearns toward the people of France, they will believe me."

"Heaven grant it!" said the queen, clasping her hands more firmly, while her tears dropped upon them. "Give us back to the love of our people, and there is no honor, no influence that shall not be yours. Ah! I remember so well when I first came to France, so young, so trusting—a child given up to them wholly by an imperial mother. How they loved me then. When I entered the theatre, they arose in one body and filled the air

with joyous salutations. If I drove through the streets, they cast flowers in my path. Oh, monsieur! what have I done? What have I done that they should change so terribly, now that I have lived so long among them, and am a mother to the children of France—the wife of the best king they ever knew? What have I done?"

Mirabeau reached forth his hand to take hers; in her tears and her helpless sorrow she was only a woman to him; but he bethought himself and drew back with a heavy sigh. Had he, indeed, the power he had boasted of? Could he, with all the force of his wonderful eloquence, bring back the popularity which had once followed this woman, as if she had been a goddess? Would not the people question his motives, and ask a reason for his change of opinion? Dare he arise in his place, and say to the world that he had just, come from an interview with the Queen of France, and was henceforth her friend and advocate? That even his glowing ideas of liberty had yielded to the tears and reasonings of a beautiful woman? Yes, he dared do even that—the people would still have faith in their leader; that which he had taught with such ardor could be softened, moulded into new forms. He would bring the royalty of France into favor with its subjects by apparent concessions, which should all seem to spring from the queen.

Marie Antoinette read his thoughts, and her face grew anxious. Had she humbled herself for nothing? Was this man's power already exhausted against her? Would the people listen when he came out in favor of a court which his eloquence had done so much to destroy?"

He read her face also, and answered it as if she had spoken.

"That which I have pledged myself to accomplish shall be done, if it cost Mirabeau his fame, and his own life. Have no fear, madame; these people are like children, they want strong men to think and act for them. Who among all their leaders has my strength, or has ever so thoroughly controlled them? With my pen, with my voice, with every power of my soul, I will work to bring these people in harmony with the court. Can you trust in me, lady?"

"I do trust in you, and I thank you for myself and for the king. Nay, in time

the people of France will look upon you as their saviour also. But what can we offer in return?"

A flush of hot-red came into Mirabeau's face. He remembered thoughts that had clung to him as he rode along—terms he had intended to make, and advantages that would relieve the necessities that were ever following the lavish extravagance of his habits. All these he had absolutely forgotten; and when the queen, in her gratitude, brought them back upon him, all the pride of his manhood recoiled. Why was he forced to be so grand, and so mean at the same moment? He cast his eyes on the ground, while the swarthy color surged in and out of his face. At last he looked up so suddenly that the thick hair was tossed back from his forehead, like the play of a lion's main.

"Nothing," he said, with the proud air of a Roman Senator. "When we have saved France and her king, the consciousness that Mirabeau has done it for Marie Antoinette, will sometimes win a smile from her, and that shall be his reward."

The queen was greatly moved. She had seen the struggle in his mind, and partially understood it. The same thoughts had occupied her before leaving the palace. She had heard of Mirabeau's extravagance, and of his proportionate greed. It had seemed to her an easy thing to purchase his help with gold, which, in the terrible difficulties that had fallen upon her, she had learned how to use as a sure political agent. But there was more in the man than she had been led to believe; and the hot flush of shame that rose to his face, when she spoke of reward, made her shrink from what might seem an offered insult.

"Those who help the king are the king's friends always," she said, with deep feeling, for this strange man had won his way to her gratitude. "But those who help us must have the means of helping."

Again Mirabeau's face flushed; but it was with pleasure that the queen had found an excuse for accepting some future bounty which had escaped him.

"One thing," he said, with touching earnestness, "one thing there is which

Mirabeau may accept from the Queen of France, and be exalted by the favor."

"Name it," answered Marie Antoinette, gently.

"Favored courtiers are permitted to kiss the queen's hand when they give their lives to her service."

The queen smiled, blushed, and reached forth her hand. Mirabeau took it, bent his knee to the ground, and pressed his lips upon it.

"Madame," he said, standing erect, with the hand in his clasp, "madame, the monarchy is saved."

"God grant it!" said the queen, with solemn emphasis.

"The monarchy is saved, or Mirabeau's life will pay the forfeit," he said, with solemnity.

The queen believed him, for there was no doubting his sincerity in the matter. Never in her life had this beautiful woman made so great a conquest, not only over the man himself, but over her own prejudices. She had come to the summer-house detesting this man; she left it impressed with his genius, flattered by his homage.

Mirabeau still held her hand. To approach this lovely woman, and win her into admiration of his genius, had been the ambition of this erratic man for many a year. It was accomplished now. He knew by the light in those magnificent eyes how great his conquest was. She was still Queen of France—even his fierce eloquence had so far failed to bring her down from that sublime height. He saw in her the only woman he had ever meet whose intellect reached his own, and whose position, at the same time, taught him to look up. Henceforth it would be his supreme object to keep her firmly on the throne; to enhance her influence, and guide it for the benefit of the people. It was a delicate task; but nothing seemed impossible to that proud, audacious man while that splendid woman stood with her hand in his.

"Now, farewell," she said. " I need not tell you to keep this interview a secret; it would be misunderstood, and might do much harm."

"It would be my glory that the whole world should know of this condescension, and of the grateful respect it has inspired; but those who lead a people must know how to be secret, and when to speak. That you have done me this honor, madame, shall be the one secret that will go with me to the grave."

With these words, the count bent low with a lofty grace that might have befitted the state- chamber at Versailles, and walked backward to the door, where he bowed again and disappeared, moving' swiftly through the glowing purple of the twilight.

Marie Antoinette seated herself in the stillness of the temple, and fell into a strange reverie. The presence of this man,- so high in his intellect, so strong in his brute force, had lifted her out of the despondency which the gathering discontent of the nation threw upon the court, and her natural energies were all aroused once more. In gaining this man she felt that the court was strengthened.

Marie Antoinette remained in this reverie until the new moon dropped down among the purplish whiteness of the clouds, from which all the scarlet and gold had died softly out, and hung there like a golden sickle, waiting for a harvest of stars. Then she remembered the hour, and how far she was from the palace, with a little thrill of fear. She gathered the shawl over her head, and, holding its shadowy lace to her bosom with one hand, went out into the Park and walked swiftly away.

Everything was still as death; the birds had ceased their soft fluttering among the leaves; and all the pretty animals had crept, away to their coverts among the ferns and undergrowth.

All at once the queen paused, and stepped back with a faint shriek. The shadow of a man fell across her path—the man himself stood in her way. The moon had just traveled through an amethystine cloud, and came out clear as crystal, illuminating that strange face, the bright, blue eyes, the ivory forehead, and that long, white beard, which waved down the man's

bosom like curves of rippling silver.

"Lady," he said, "you look kind and good; tell me how I can gain access to the daughter of Marie Therese."

The voice was low and broken, but sweet with humility. There was nothing to fear from a man who spoke like that.

"You speak of the queen?" said Marie Antoinette, with gentle dignity.

"Yes, I speak of the queen; that fair, brave woman, whose mother, a saint in heaven, was once my friend."

"You have seen my mother?" cried Marie Antoinette, surprised out of all prudence.

"Your mother? Oh! that I do not know. It was Marie Therese, the good Empress of Austria, of whom I was speaking; and it is her child, the young Queen of France, I wish to see."

"The young Queen of France! Alas! she is no longer young," said Marie Antoinette, with a pathetic remembrance of the silver threads that were creeping into her hair.

The man shook his head, and lifted one hand to it with an air of bewilderment.

"You mistake, lady; I saw her twice, and she was young and fair, like the lilies—so fair, so fair!"

"Was that in Austria, old man?"

"Yes, it was in Austria. She stood by the side of her mother, a grand, princely woman, dauntless as a lion—but I saw her tremble. It is awful to see such terror in the eyes of a brave woman; but it was there, and I had done it. Ah, me! there is a power beyond that of monarchy—a fearful power. They wrested it from me—they wrested it from me; and I am only a poor, weak old man."

"Who are you? I cannot make out by the tones of your voice to what nation you belong; they carry the accent of no country with them that I can discern."

"That is because I have been born again; buried, you know, and risen from the grave."

Marie Antoinette looked anxiously about her. This was the talk of a madman. How had he come there? By what device could she escape him?

"You cannot understand me," persisted the man, plaintively. "You are afraid of a poor, helpless old man, who has but one wish in the world."

"And what is that?" inquired the queen, reassured by his meek earnestness.

"To see Marie Antoinette, to take the serpent from her hand, and the curse from her destiny."

Again the queen recoiled; these words seemed to her the wild talk of a madman.

"Can you tell me how to reach her, lady?"

"That is impossible. The queen admits no strangers to her presence."

"Ah, me! and I am a stranger to every one now. My own child did not know me, lady. The wife of my bosom was afraid of the creature she had dragged up from his grave. She is not the saipe woman I left—yet she is my wife."

"And who is your wife?"

"No matter; you would not care to know, for she does not love the queen; and I think you are something to the daughter of Marie Therese, or you would not be in this place. It is strange, but at first I thought it was the

queen walking by herself—as if she ever did! It would be dangerous, I can tell her that— very dangerous? for there exist people over yonder who hate this fair young queen. But I pity her; oh, yes! I pity her from the depths of my heart!"

"Why—why do you pity her?"

"Because I know. Because they have taken the good from me and turned it to evil for her.

Ah! if I could see her; if she Would only believe me!"

"Believe you in what?"

"In the thing I would ask of her."

"What would that be?"

"No matter. I can tell no one but herself."

"Tell me, and if the thing you want is reasonable, I will ask it of her."

"Do you see her? Are you one of her ladies? You should be, else how came you here?"

"How came you here?" demanded the queen.

"Oh! I accomplished it at last. Days and days I have waited and watched; but this morning I saw a man go warily through a gate. He left it unlocked. I dared not follow, but lingered near, for the temptation was strong upon me. I waited patiently. Oh, lady! I have learned to be patient; to wait, and wait, and wait..."

The man broke of dreamily. His hand waved to and fro in the air, as if he grasped the moonbeams.

"But you have not told me?"

"Told you about what?"

"About the man."

"Oh! He came back with his face ablaze with some great joy, and while I was thinking to speak with him, strode away with such grand, rapid steps, that they took my breath away. Then he was lost in a grove beyond the highway; and directly he came out again, mounted on a horse, which went rushing toward Paris like the wind. I knew the horseman."

"You?"

"Yes. It is not strange. I know a great many people, in a way; and they all talk before me, thinking that I, most of any one, must hate the man they call Louis Capet, and his wife. Poor thing! Poor thing! Why should I hate her or him? He was not to blame for the cruel acts of his grandfather. I often say that; but no one cares to listen. So I saw' the horseman, and knowing him to be bitter as death against the people up yonder, watched till he came forth and rode away. Then I opened the gate, which he had left ajar, and came in. What was he doing here? These walls should shut out all enemies to the king, for he is not a bad man. Tell me, lady—what was the Count Mirabeau doing here? Did he come to spy upon the queen, or murder the king?"

Marie Antoinette started, and turned pale in the moonlight. Was her secret known to this man? How long had he been in the grounds? She controlled herself, and turned to him kindly.

"Are you quite certain the person you saw was Count Mirabeau?"

"Certain? Yes. One does not forget a face like his; besides, I have seen it often—too often! too often! What was he doing here? I tell you again he is the enemy of your king; he hates the queen."

"Well, no harm is done," said the queen.

"Not yet; but, lady, if you see the queen, warn her of this man. I would, but that my business with her is so much more important."

"I will warn her," said the queen."

"That is kind. Oh! if I could only see her, and undo the evil thing which is sure to carry a curse with it, when a minute could turn it into a blessing. You could not ask her?"

His great, wistful eyes were turned on her face imploringly; he grasped the lace of her shawl with his eager hand. She stepped back nervously, and wrenched the lace from his grasp. In doing this her hand flashed out from its covering; the moonlight struck the great star-like diamonds on her fingers, and dimly revealed a serpent of twisted gold, with a grAn beetle in its coils, which twined around one finger.

The old man uttered a cry so sharp and wild that it rang through the Park.

"Give it me! Give it me! It is mine! It is mine!" he cried, snatching at the hand on which he had seen the serpent-ring. "Oh, my God! it shall not escape me again! All the fiends themselves shall not keep it from me!"

"The old man caught the hand, which again buried itself in the black lace; but he trembled so violently that the lace tore in his grasp, and the queen broke from him in extreme terror. This insane violence convinced her that the man was mad. She darted away, and ran for her very life, not daring to cry out, but rushing on, and on, till the very breath left her body.

The old man followed the flying woman, calling after her with pathetic cries, and beseeching her to stop. She looked back, a hand grasped at her shoulder, but she swerved aside quickly, and the old man fell headlong.

The queen uttered a quick cry of thankfulness, and sped on, and on, till she came in sight of the palace.

The old man, who had fallen headlong on the turf, lay insensible for a few minutes; but after a little he lifted himself up, and looked around for the lady who had escaped him.

"Gone! gone! gone!" he cried out, with pathetic mournfulness. "How near I was! My hand touched it! I felt the thrill and the power flash through me like an arrow, and then it was gone! Who was the lady? How did that ring come on her finger? Does she know that to her it will bring nothing but curses, to me power, strength, the blessedness of youth. Ah! why did she escape me!"

He stood awhile with his clasped hands uplifted, his eyes full of tears. The agony of his disappointment quivered in every mild feature. Then he turned away, muttering to himself,

"Oh! how they baffle me! How long am I to wait? Are the fiends forever to have mastery? Oh, me! I could bear it if no evil came to others, while good is withheld from me. How long am I to wait?"

There was no madness in the old man's voice, but unutterable disappointment, the very mournfulness of despair. He turned his steps toward the gate, which Mirabeau had left open; his step was slow and feeble; tears dropped from his eyes, and fell upon his beard, where they trembled like jewels. His lips quivered, and gave out soft murmurs of distress. Thus the old man passed through the gate, and into the highway, along which he toiled on to Paris.

(to be continued).

